1: Messing E-5 (1953-1954)1957 MP5 Amhara MP5



463 once a noble profession, requiring much intelligence
265 and training, but now a handsome cash gift, partly for the wedded couple and partly as a tip, can introduce a non-prestigeful guest to the table of the nobles. The profession has thus dropped to the level of the itinerant musician, the "azmari", and brings neither prestige nor any particular shame.

463 A still honorable semi-specialization is that of
532 the painter of religious or religious-royal themes in the church, the "seel-sali". He is often a layman loosely attached to the church, who learned his craft while attending church school and then apprenticed himself to a master painter. He is often hired by an individial landlord or well-to-do, often aging, pious Amhara man or noble lady, who wish to make this gift to the church and often order the painter to paint in a small, modest likeness of themselves or their recently departed parents. (See section of art).

464 The third category of "damoz" labor[1] is traditionally found in the rural areas primarily in the case of the temporary marriage. The availability of ex-slaves rarely makes it necessary to hire on any but temporary agricultural labor, for it would be too expensive and difficult to hire Amhara labor. There is, however, a type of day laborer, "mwayatänya", or simply "seratänya" (worker), who is now paid about Eth$1.- a day, and can be hired for some temporary job without the other involvements sich as leave for church holidays and kin-visiting. A poor Amhara will sometimes hire on for some ready cash,

[1] [i.e. "temporary" -- see p.215, cat.116. -Analyst]

793 [661] Parish priests, (unlike mämhër scholars) are also not bashful about demanding their due (produce tithe, sheep, honey, even cash) from their tenants of church land. Sardonic peasant humor expresses this in the proverb:

[539] "The bashful priest,
the blind donkey,
(are one)". (i.e. both would be helpless and starve to death).

532 346 Among artisans who do specialist work for the church is the artist of church paintings, usually highly colorful and realistic scenes from the suffering of the saints, in morbid and gory detail; the beauties of heaven and the trinity; the horrors of hell ruled by a chained, soul-munching Satan; etc. These religious and semi-religious story illustrations and legends are painted on canvas and then attached to the inside of church walls.

874 Church students are usually boys 10 years or over (never girls), who at first learn the Geez-Amharic alphabet, reading Geez without translating, beginning with the Epistle of the Apostle John. They are taught by rote, memorizing by chanting the portions out loud. There is very little writing in the early grades, and experimentation is traditionally discouraged, for fear that the boys might use their new-won learning to write magic amulets. Before examinations, church studetns stimulate 874 276 their mental processes by eating the leaf of a Datura weed resembling Jimson weed called "astänager" (lit. to stimulate talk) which is also used by däbtära in exor-

goatskin. 559

532 For it is in connection with the church institution that most of the limited Amhara decorative arts received their reason for tolerated existence and even encouragement. The most famous development of these arts are the Abyssinian Coptic churchpaintings. While writing and doodling and drawing is discouraged among the mass of church students because of the fear of misuse of black magic; skilled and supervised artists working within the framework of the church are freed from this suspicion by the sanctity of the church.

The skilled painter of church art, ("se'el säli") may receive a commission for a specific painting from the priests or from a lay sponsor who may have himself or his deceased parents memorialized by ordering the artist to paint pictures of the sponsors into corners of the saint's painting, though in modestly smaller scale. Some artists have even painted themselves into a corner.

Most paintings are on canvas, in very vivid colors, and are affixed to the hard mud-and-wattle walls inside the church. Apprentices are drawn from upper students in church school, and first practice on silhouettes (footnote 100); Some of these incipient doodles can be seen on the whitewashed outer walls of some of the sturdier churches, e.g. at monasteries. They practice realistic drawings such as saints on horseback, daily life, games and animals, though their paintings will all be realistically portrayed religious scenes. Ink used is often made from the black fruit of the "tämbälal" tree (Jasminum floribundum), but dabtara scribes often use imported blue ink called "nil". A quill ("be'er") was traditionally used for writing and drawing.

[58]

Footnote 100 - Griaule, M.: Silhouettes et Graffiti Abyssins. Paris, 1935

●532 The actual church paintings are in oils, and they are the most amazing products of Abyssinian art. They are highly formalized compositions, which is the chief concern of the artist, but accuracy of significant detail, expression and action, is also important. (To the foreigner the scenes and persons portrayed at first look naive and childlike.) Some scenes, if showing continuous developments of the story told, are arranged in strips like American comic strips, with the words spoken by the characters written in Amharic near the mouth of the speaker; names of sacred figures are written in Geez, so that no one can misread the story portrayed.

Among frequent subjects are scenes from the Bible, especially New Testament, portrayed realistically even to teardrops and drops of blood; and the lives of saints. Thus, the Abyssinian saint Takla Haymanot is shown one-legged, for he lost the other on a mission. Biblical characters are portrayed as light or light-brown of skin, and [776] God is shown as a long-bearded Mediterranean-or-European-Looking elder. Abyssinians are shown as brown in coloring, other Africans as black with peppercorn hair. One of the most frequent strips is the subject of the voyage of the Queen of Sheba to the court of Solomon, the conception of the prince Menelik I, and his miraculous return after reaching adulthood. This is semi-religious, but acceptable because of the "Solomonic Dynasty" acting as defender of the faith. By extension however, battle scenes showing Abyssinians defeating the Italian invaders in 1896, also "heathen" Shanqalla and Danakil, are occasionally seen and have become common for the tourist trade.

One of the noteworthy symbolisms in these oil paintings is the traditional portrayal of infidels, evil beings, demons, sinners, and torturers of Christian saints - in profile. By contrast, all good Christians are painted full-face. In profile, only one eye is shown, which may be one of the possible explanations - reduction of the power

532 of the evil eye. Another possible explanation is that centuries ago this symbolism was adopted from Armenian paintings; which is not surprising in view of early, though interrupted contacts between Byzantine and Coptic church art, and later on even Persian and Indian contacts (footnote 101). The amazing realism of natural objects may possibly be of ancient origin, and has survived the emphasis on highly formalized composition enforced by the church.

Scenes depicting everyday life ("abore"), or the famous motif showing the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon (mentioned in the Bible), are also painted on gourds, the useful utensil with the smooth surface. But only the well-to-do or noble families can afford this; (also the tourist). Sometimes the secular motifs show figures of famous military warlords and provincial dynastic heads of the past; and simple, incised geometric figures pleasing to the traditional feudal lord whose appreciation of art wanted direct, simple, and realistic portrayal.

4. Amhara Ideas about Nature and Mankind.

887 812 While his material culture is limited, speculation about the structure, function, and most of all meaning, of the non-material world ranges unfettered in the Amhara culture pattern. Moreover, it is freely expressed, evidencing deep thought, but primarily a wonderment. Often there is a sensitivity that resembles Weltschmerz. This wondering out loud affects most Amhara men when they reach the "shemagalye" (elder) stage, and is one of the most frequently and intensely expressed subjects of their conversation; while at younger ages they are too

Footnote 101 - Mollet, G.: Note (in) Aethiopica, Vol. 3 pp. 191-2 New York, 1935.

186 quoted to praise farming as the best and most typical Amhara occupation, casually refer to the Muslim as a person not bound by social ethics:

[539] "He traded - (then he) cheated;
he was appointed (official) - he began (to act) like a Muslim;
(but) he (who) was a farmer - and became a king!"

[177] Nevertheless, the influence of Islam, probably by slow diffusion, has been considerable on Abyssinian Christianity through the centuries. Their avoidance of "unclean, forbidden things" ("erm"), such as pork, though officially based on the Old Testament prohibitions, was probably reawakened or reintroduced and emphasized through the pressure of Muslim ideas, geographically so close.

[532] The Amhara paint an infidel, like any evil person, with one eye, in profile, for "he has only half a soul, is only half-born, sees only half the truth." The outsider is regarded as automatically of evil personality.

C. Amhara Ideas about Body and Personality.

826 Not all Amhara ideas about human beauty are dominated by racial criteria. A long, lean face ("fit sälkakka") is considered handsome in a man, while a broad face ("fit mäda") is considered ugly; this may bear some relation to the gerontomorphic preference over the pedamorphic.

[304] A long neck ("angät") is a mark of beauty, in both sexes, but noted especially in the woman who therefore may have a series of necklaces tattooed on to her neck. The beauty of the long neck is referred to in the following proverb:

[539] "The neck of the dead child
is longer (than ever);
(meaning, "a good thing that came when of no use).

The forehead is considered the location of good fortune, and a large forehead is considered a mark of beauty in men.

4: Alvarez M-5 (1520-1526) 1881
MP5 Amhara MP5



346 is painted, it is not certain whether it is stone or wood. It has two sets of cloisters round the body of the church, both 346 covered in, and much painted with figures of apostles, 532 patriarchs, prophets, and many things of the Old Law, and 353 many angels, and St. George on horseback, who is in all the churches. This monastery also possesses a great cloth, like a piece of tapestry, on which is the crucifix and effigy of Our Lady and the apostles, and other figures of patriarchs and prophets, and each one has his Latin name written, so that no man of the country made it. It has many small and ancient pictures, not well made, and they are not upon the altars, for it is not their custom: they keep them in a [212] sacristy, mixed up with many books, and they bring them out on feast days. There is in this monastery a very large kitchen and bakehouse, also a very large refectory, in which 792 they eat. They mostly eat three and three[1] in a large dish, 262 it is not deep, but flat like a tray, and their food is very [264] poor. The bread is of maize and barley, and other grain which they call *taffo*,[2] a small black grain. They make this bread round, and of the size and roundness of a citron,[3] and they give three of these to each friar: to the novices they give three loaves to two of them, it is a matter of amazement how they can maintain themselves. They also give them a few vegetables, without salt or oil. Of this food they send to a great many old pensioners, who do not come to the refectory. Besides seeing these things when we 792 buried Matthæus, I saw them many times, because I came there to pass time with the friars, principally on feast days, when we were near there. In this way I learned about them and their property, and revenues and customs. In my opinion there were generally always a hundred friars in this

[1] By threes.

[2] Mansfield Parkins calls it teff, the species of corn most esteemed in this country.

[3] Zambac: not referred to in Selves' translation.

4: Alvarez M-5 (1520-1526) 1881
MP5 Amhara MP5



643 735 There are many royal farms belonging to the Prester, in which a great quantity of bread is gathered, which is given to honourable persons, and the poor, and to poor monasteries and churches, without Prester John making any profit of the produce and revenue of these farms, but only alms.

241 In all the country there is much bread, wheat and barley; in other lands there is more millet than wheat or barley, in these, and where wheat and barley, there is much taff and dagusha (seeds not known to us), pulse, beans, pease, and all vegetables; and in other lands all sorts of grain and vegetables in great quantity and abundance. There are 312 many water springs, but no fountains made of stone. In the town of Aquaxumo, where the Queens Saba and Candacia were, there are many wells and tanks made with good masonry.

532 In the town of Aquaxumo there are images very well made, and figures of lions and dogs, and oxen, and other antiquities made of stone. In this town Queen Candacia became a Christian by the advice of her eunuch, whom St. Philip baptized by inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

491 [563] In all this country there is no bridge of stone or of wood; in no part of the kingdoms or lordships of Prester John are there Jews. There are infinite quantities of sugar canes, 137 and they do not know how to make it; grapes and peaches are ripe in the month of February and end in April: there are many oranges, lemons and citrons, and few pot herbs, because they do not plant them.

136 Animals, namely lions, ounces, tigers, wolves, deer, antas,[1] wild cows, foxes, lynxes,[2] wild boars, porcupines, civet cats, roedeer, gazelles, elephants, and other animals not known to us, of which the country is full, except two which I never saw there, namely bears and rabbits.

Birds, partridges of three kinds, like ours, other fowls

[1] *Anta* is a South American animal. [2] Probably hyænas.

4: Alvarez M-5 (1520-1526) 1881
MP5 Amhara MP5



154 There are many lepers in this country, and they do not live separated from the people, they live all together; there are many people who, out of their devotion, wash them, and tend their sores with their hands.

231 There is a great quantity of honey in all the country, and the bees are not in hives, but inside the houses, where the cultivators live, clinging to the walls on the inside, where they have a mode of egress outside, and also inside they surround the house: but they do not on this account desist from dwelling in the house, because the bees go outside. There are a great number of these swarms of bees, chiefly in the monasteries, there are also many in the woods and mountains, and the men put hives near the trees and fill them with bees, and bring them in them to the houses.

346 Since no one sits in the churches, at their doors outside of them, and within the circuit, there are always a great quantity of staves with cross pieces like a .....[1] or cripple's crutch, and each one takes his staff and leans upon it as long as he is at the offices of the church. In the churches there are many effigies painted on the walls. Effigies of [532] our Lord and our Lady, and of the apostles and patriarchs, and prophets and angels, and in all the churches St. George. They have not got solid images. There are many books in [212] [191] the churches all written on parchment, because there is no paper there, and the writing and language is Tigray,[2] which is that of the first country in which Christianity began.

In this country they are not accustomed to write to one another, neither do the officers of justice write anything. All the justice that is done, and what is ordered, is by messengers and speech. I say only that I saw the property of Prester John written down on being delivered up and received.

554 There would be much fruit and much more tillage in the country, if the great men did not ill treat the people, for

[1] *Taha.* [2] *Tigia.*

4: Alvarez M-5 (1520-1526) 1881
MP5 Amhara MP5



784 He says that during all Passion week they are dressed in black or blue, and do not speak to one another for grief, saying that Judas by a kiss of peace betrayed his Lord.

532 784 Although there are in the churches effigies painted on all the walls, and also crosses, nevertheless on no cross is a crucifix painted, neither have they any of solid carving; because they say they are not deserving to see Christ crucified.

792 778 All the priests, friars, and gentlemen carry crosses in their hands, both on foot and on horseback; and the laymen of the people and lower people carry crosses round their necks. Every priest and friar carries a little horn of copper with holy water, and the hosts where they arrive beg of them water and a blessing, and they give it. Before they eat they throw drops of water on the food, and also in the drinking vases.

411 Their arms are assagays, few swords, a few shirts of mail, long and narrow; our Portuguese say that they are not of good mail.

There are many bows and arrows, they have no feathers like ours; there are very few helmets and casques. Those that there are have come since they have had intercourse with the Portuguese. There are plenty of strong bucklers;

713 there are no cannon, except two swivel guns which we brought them. At our departure there were fourteen muskets at Court, which they bought from the Turks who come there to trade. The Prester ordered whatever they asked to be given for them, and ordered men to be taught to shoot.

534 There are trumpets, but not good ones; there are many drums of copper which come from Cairo, and others of wood which have leather on both sides; there are tambourines like ours, and large cymbals which they sound. There are flutes and some instruments with chords, square like harps, which they call David moçanquo, which means the harp of David. They play these to the Prester, and not well.

5: Bruce T-5 (1768-1773) 1804
MP5 Amhara MP5



small division answering to the holy of holies. This 346
is so narrow, that none but the priests can go into it.
You are bare-footed whenever you enter the church; 783
and, if bare-footed, you may go through every part of
it, if you have any such curiosity, provided you are
pure, i. e. have not been concerned with women for
24 hours before, or touched carrion, or dead bodies
(a curious assemblage of ideas); for in that case you
are not to go within the precincts, or outer circumfe-
rence of the church, but stand and say your prayers
at an awful distance among the cedars.

All persons of both sexes, under Jewish disqualifi-
cations, are obliged to observe this distance; and this
is always a place belonging to the church, where, un-
less in Lent, you see the greatest part of the congrega-
tion; but this is left to your own conscience; and, if
there was either great inconvenience in the one situa-
tion, or great satisfaction in the other, the cause would
be otherwise.

When you go to the church, you put off your shoes 782
before your first entering the outer precinct; but you
must leave a servant there with them, or else they
will be stolen, if good for any thing, by the priests
and monks before you come out of the church. At
entry you kiss the threshold, and two door-posts, go in
and say what prayer you please; that finished, you
come out again, and your duty is over. The churches 532
are full of pictures, painted on parchment, and nailed 346
upon the walls, in a manner little less slovenly than
you see paltry prints in beggarly country ale-houses.
There has been always a sort of painting known a-
mong the scribes, a daubing much inferior to the
worst of our sign-painters. Sometimes, for a particu-
lar church, they get a number of pictures of saints,
on skins of parchment, ready finished from Cairo, in
a style very little superior to these performances of

5: Bruce T-5 (1768-1773) 1804
MP5 Amhara MP5



346 their own. They are placed like a frize, and hung in
532 the upper part of the wall. St George is generally there with his dragon, and Demetrius fighting a lion. There is no choice in their saints; they are both of the Old and New Testament, and some that might be dispensed with from both. There is St Pontius Pilate and his wife; there is St Balaam and his ass; Samson and his jaw-bone; and so of the rest. But the thing that surprised me most was a kind of square-miniature upon the front of the head-piece, or mitre, of the priest, administering the sacrament at Adowa, representing Pharaoh on a white horse, plunging in the Red Sea, with many guns and pistols swimming upon the surface of it around him.

Nothing embossed, nor in relief, ever appears in any of the churches; all this would be reckoned idolatry, so much that they do not wear a cross, as has been represented, on the top of the ball of the sendick, or standard, because it casts a shade; but there is no doubt that pictures have been used in their churches from the very earliest age of Christianity.

798 The Abuna is looked upon as the patriarch of the Abyssinian church, for they have little knowledge of the Coptic patriarch of Alexandria. We are perfectly ignorant of the history of these prelates for many years after their appointment. The first of these mentioned is Abuna Tecla Haimanout, who distinguished himself by the restoration of the royal family, and the regulations he made both in the church and state, as we have seen in the history of those times. A very remarkable, but wise regulation was then made, that the Abyssinians should not have it in their power to choose one of their own countrymen as Abuna.

Wise men saw the fallen state of literature among them; and unless opportunity was given, from time to time, for their priests to go abroad to Jerusalem for their instruction, and for the purpose of bringing the

8: Rey G-5 (1910-1920)1935
MP5 Amhara MP5



the eye. Its beauty was not increased by the addition of a corrugated iron annexe for the purpose of seating some of the foreign guests at the Emperor's coronation.

The Abouna was good enough to arrange for us to visit the church, and we were received with ceremony by a number of priests, who were exceedingly kind and enabled us to make a thorough inspection, and even allowed us to take some photographs (which unfortunately, owing to the bad light, did not come out). They showed us everything with great enthusiasm and begged us to return "when a great feast was in progress". The building consists of three portions, a sort of outer gallery, an inner court, and finally the Holy Place or Holy of Holies, an inner chamber in the centre of the building in which rests the *Tabot* or representative of the Ark of the Covenant to which only the priests are allowed access.

The priests threw open the doors of the Holy Place for us to see in; it contained a kind of altar where the Sacraments are kept, and was surrounded by priests in very gorgeous vestments, burning incense and holding big crosses and crucifixes.

In one of the galleries a service was proceeding. Two priests were beating with their hands very big drums made of wood and hide; many others were shaking their curious little brass cymbals; and all were chanting, swaying their bodies, and slowly waving their praying-sticks. The time was really good, and the chant was rhythmic and tuneful, and not at all unmelodious.

The galleries were profusely decorated with huge life-size paintings depicting mainly scenes from the Scriptures, scenes from the life of Christ, the miracles, etc.; one dreadfully realistic picture of the Massacre

8: Rey G-5 (1910-1920)1935
MP5 Amhara MP5



of the Innocents was very striking. There was also a portrait of the Emperor Menelik, and of other noted characters in Abyssinian history; the likenesses of royal and other famous persons are frequently to be found on the walls or among the possessions of the principal churches.

In this connection an amusing incident is told by Stern. King Sehala Selassie had been given by Captain Harris' mission to the Court of Shoa, a portrait of Queen Victoria. This had been carefully guarded for many years amongst his treasures until his death, some time after which his successor, King Haile Malekot, presented it to the principal church at Ankober where the people used to flock on grand festivities to worship it as the representation of the Virgin Mary!

The *Tabot*, to which reference has been made, is the object of much veneration and has to be blessed or consecrated prior to being used in the particular church to which it is allocated. In one case the priest in charge of the church had committed a murder, and the *Tabot* had to be sent up to Addis to be reconsecrated before it could be used again.

The most prominent features of the practice of their religion are the fasts, feasts, and pageants; and each of these is sufficiently remarkable. A very large part of the year—about 150 days—falls under the category of fast or feast, and both are strictly observed. During their fasts they are forbidden not only meat, but also butter and milk and eggs, and it is really surprising to see to what an extent this rigid abstinence is followed, especially as the fasting periods are lengthy, that prior to Easter lasting forty days.

For a day or so immediately prior to the main feast,

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5



times brought dissension to the state, the legitimate Crown was triumphant most of the time. 175*

In the history of Ethiopian literature the period has been called a Golden Age.[1] The important works composed during this time include *The Glory of Kings,* which contains the story of the Queen of Sheba, Solomon, and their offspring, Menelik I, legendary first king of Ethiopia; *The Book of the Mysteries of Heaven and Earth,* a compilation of occult theology and numerology, with a Miltonic account of the struggle between Michael and Satan; *The Christian Romance of Alexander the Great,* a fantastic portrayal of Alexander as a Christian hero who traverses the Land of Darkness and the miraculous Land of the Living; the moralizing tracts of the greatest emperor of the period, Zar'a Yā'qob; as well as numerous lives of saints and translations of Christian writings from Arabic. 175* 538

Connoisseurs of Ethiopian art attribute the most original and refined paintings to the latter part of this period. Using translucent colors and austere shapes and design, Ethiopian monks brought to expression an intense spirituality in the form of miniatures in illuminated manuscripts.[2] 175* 532

At the same time this was the Heroic Age of Ethiopian warfare. Amda Ṣeyon vanquished sixteen Muslim chiefs to the south and west; the valor of Sayfa Ar'ed was celebrated in medieval Arab tales of chivalry; Dāwit I pushed his victories against the Muslims as far as Zeila on the Gulf of Aden. Improved military equipment and organization under Yeshāq brought the imperial forces to a new level of discipline and power, which Yeshāq used to establish his authority in many southern areas. Zar'a Yā'qob, famous for endowing churches and monasteries and for encouraging literature and art, was a successful warrior in his own right. 175* 648

A close-up of Ethiopia at the height of its medieval synthesis is provided by Father Francisco Alvares, Portuguese emissary to Abyssinia during the years 1520–27.[3] We see a prosperous kingdom, its far-flung dominions headed by hereditary rulers and royal appointees, all of whom pay tribute in kind to the emperor. The tribute consists of horses and mules, blankets and cloths, silk stuffs and gold, all in impressive amounts. The provincial heads, and the armies they must make available, live off the land they govern. The numerous priests and monks are supported by lands granted them by the king. Justice is administered at three levels, with the possibility of appeal from the local judge, to the provincial governor, to the royal court itself. The king's mobile camp, large as a town, is his capital, so that he spends his years marching about from one corner of his domain to another. 175* 64 631 [651] [69]

The monarch at the time of Alvares' visit was Lebna Dengel (1508–40), a man of pride and temper. He refused to heed counsel that the kingdom was imperiled by threats from the outside. Indeed, legend has it that he was discontented with the prevailing civil harmony and begged God to send an ad- 175* 643

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5



*175 643 633 517 chant"), *qenē*, and *tergum* ("interpretation")—is said to have received its definitive organization.

Dāwit III appears to have had a pronounced interest in Amharic folk song, for the more perfect enjoyment of which he built a special hall in the imperial compound. Because of this he has been called "Dāwit the Singer"—no term of praise in a land where minstrelsy is looked down on and where serious deportment is expected of royalty. Actually, this epithet, with its connotation of "playboy," was not deserved. Dāwit was a religious man, and in his brief reign built two churches. Knowledgeable Gondarēs today insist that, at first, even the priests were happy to join him in the amusement hall to listen to the one-stringed fiddles and the witty songs. Only after Dāwit's partiality to the [798] Unctionist doctrine (that the humanity of Christ was made divine through the unction of the Holy Spirit) led him to persecute the Unionist clergy (who hold that humanity and divinity are blended in the single nature of Christ) did they abuse his music hall and tarnish his name.[7]

[341] Interest in architecture was revived by Bakāffā. He constructed a long U-shaped castle which, together with the new castle of his Empress Mantuāb, completed the major complex of buildings in Gondar. Mantuāb's castle is [532] noted for bas-reliefs of the Ethiopian Cross, while her other castle at nearby Qusquam is decorated with bas-reliefs depicting saints and animals as well.

The tastes of Iyāsu II were especially refined. He cultivated extensive gardens and orchards, an unusual pursuit for an Amhara monarch. He built a large and handsome church. He began to construct a palace, in the lavish [344] decoration of which he took a personal interest. Budge writes of this:

> A number of Christians who had fled from Smyrna took refuge in Gondar, and the king employed them to decorate his palace with filigree work. The upper parts of the walls of the throne room were covered with three rows of Venetian mirrors set in gilded copper frames, and their lower parts . . . with slabs of ivory. The roof was made of painted cane mosaic, the work of the Falasha. . . . Iyāsu II spent his days with the workmen, and himself learned to do some of the work under the direction of the Greek workmen.[8]

*175 633 51[illegible] The decline of imperial power at Gondar after Iyāsu II did not produce a slackening of the cultural activities that had been concentrated there. During the reign of Takla Hāymānot II (1769–77), for example, when the actual [643] power at Gondar was in the hands of a lord from Tigre, seven more churches were built. One of these, Ba'ātā Māryām, eventually became one of the most [874] famous schools for the teaching of *aquāquām* ("religious dance"), and in its heyday boasted 276 masters. Another, Abi Egzi, became noted for instruction in *tergum*, and is still a leading school for such studies.

[538] The composition of verse, in forms which had become canonized during the early Gondar period, continued to flourish. As political turmoil often

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5



Poetry stands as the most appreciated of all traditional forms of expression, and nearly two-thirds of the secondary and half the college students state that they compose Amharic verse themselves, on occasions ranging from public celebrations to private moments of great joy or sorrow. This is as might be expected in view of the tremendous importance of poetry in traditional Amhara culture (see chapters vi and vii). Painting, on the other hand, has played a rather inconspicuous part in Abyssinia. (Its genuine achievement in the high culture, the often remarkable Ethiopian miniatures, is frequently repudiated by modernizing Ethiopians for being too "backward.") Those students who do prefer Ethiopian-style paintings explain their preference on the grounds that they find them more intelligible and closer to Ethiopian life, and stress their value as reminders of Ethiopia's past.[26] The majority who prefer European-style paintings offer primarily mechanical reasons; they find them more "efficient," "systematic," and "accurate"—more "up-to-date."

In response to a question on their favorite type of foreign music, the students gave a wide variety of answers, ranging from "Oriental" and "religious" to "Rose, Rose, I Love You" and "Mozart." By far the most frequently mentioned musical preference was "classical" (20 per cent). This was followed by approximately equal percentages of preference for American popular songs; jazz and swing; rock 'n' roll; and Sudanese music. Of foreign dances, the most popular are the waltz and the tango (17 per cent each), followed at some distance by rock 'n roll, cha cha cha, and jitterbug. In their movie preferences, finally, historical (17 per cent) and educational (12 per cent) films are the favorites, followed by war, detective, and adventure films.

One other area of consumption should be discussed in this context: the use of cigarettes. To the tradition-minded Amhara smoking symbolizes all that is objectionable in Western culture, while to some of the modern adolescents it symbolizes the excitement and "life" of modernity. The number of these latter is not really very high, at least not among those still in school; but it is noteworthy that emphatic rejection of smoking by most of the students is based primarily on the rationalistic arguments that it is injurious to health and wastes money, rather than on the traditional argument that it is sinful and counter to Christian custom. The most violent reactions of any, however, were aroused by the question: "How do you feel about women smoking?" In the secondary school sample to which this question was posed, disapproval was practically unanimous, and the comments included "makes me ashamed," "it is scaring," "I could choke her to death," and "worse than hell itself."

A few minor differences in taste appear in connection with differences in sex and school attended. The female students in our secondary school sample show a greater partiality to native foods than do the males, and, on the other hand, greater interest in Western music and dance. Peculiarities in the sub-

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5



ber of Amhara folk tales, moreover, have as their central theme the resolution of conflict or the attainment of mastery over the environment by means of eating something or presenting food to someone.[14] It is a theme conspicuous in the legend which celebrates the ascendance of the first of the Shoan Amhara emperors, Yekuno Amlāk (1270–85). According to *The Book of the Riches of Kings,* Yekuno Amlāk ate by chance the head of a rooster which had been set out for a king of the rival Zāgwē Dynasty:

> And this youth Yakuno Amlak found the head of the cock which the woman had left by the fire-place, and he took it and ate it, and it filled his belly, and it made him an exalted person and so mighty a man that he was superior to every other man of might, and it made his face to shine like the light of the sun, and his majesty filled all the other servants of the king with awe, and all the people feared him, and they marvelled at him, and they loved him exceedingly, and they placed him in their hearts, and they recognized that the grace of God was upon him, and they said, "What is the thing which hath come upon this young man?"[15]

*Oral Sadism*

In addition to subserving a passive, receptive mode of relating to the environment, preoccupation with the oral zone also figures in Amhara culture as the locus of a variety of aggressive modes of behavior and fantasy. Hostility is expressed by a number of oral gestures. Sticking out the tongue and spitting on the ground in front of somebody, for example, are two forms of non-verbal insult. Biting the lower lip is an indication of anger. Touching the tongue, and then forehead, chin, and cheeks, signifies "You just wait!" When fighting, men sometimes bite one another's ears. The activation of a strong biting impulse in situations of military combat is suggested by the following refrain from an Amhara martial declaration, recorded over a century ago:

> Oh brothers, you are hungry and thirsty! Oh true sons of my mother,
> Are you not birds of prey? Come on! There is the enemy's flesh.
> And I, I will be the rider to butcher for you! Forward,
> And if you lack hydromel, I will give you my blood to drink.[16]

The theme of cannibalism appears in various forms in the Amhara imagination. One of the common subjects of traditional Amhara painting is the story of the cannibal Balaya Sab. His name is in Ge'ez, and means "Eater of Men." The story about him derives from one of the old legends collected in *The Miracles of the Blessed Virgin Mary.*[17] Balaya Sab was a wicked man who fed on the flesh of humans. At his death he appeared before St. George, who measured his evil deeds against his good deeds on a large scale. On the side of evil deeds were placed the souls of all those he had eaten, so heavy a weight that the devil began to make ready to carry him off to hell. Then

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

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Fig. 57.—St. Gabra Manfas Qeddus [P 238-B]

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5



in the same half-interested manner in which the shepherd directs cattle by throwing stones.

The effect of Amhara socialization, then, is to inhibit rather than to stimulate the development of individuality. The spirited and expressive Amhara child of two or three is conditioned to become, for the rest of his childhood and to a large extent throughout life, taciturn, fearful, and slightly morose.

The traditional system of formal education is no less indifferent to the personality of the learner. The atmosphere of the schools where reading is taught is harsh and punitive. Pedagogy at all levels of instruction is based on repetition and memorization, with strict adherence to the conventions preferred by the teacher.* The traditional ban on the teaching of writing may also be related to the desire to keep the student's mind on received formulations. Amhara formal education in no wise seeks to cultivate the individual, but aims solely to prepare cultural specialists who will be able to perform the rituals and perpetuate the teachings of the Ethiopian Church. The instruction of noble children, finally, in the arts of riding, swimming, shooting, and playing the lyre has more to do with the transmission of the manners and skills appropriate to a position of high status than with a concern for personal development.

### *Music and Art*

Music and dance are greatly enjoyed by the Amhara, but little attention is given to the cultivation of their forms or the refinement of their performance. The music is monodic, both melodically and rhythmically, and, except for some intricately structured accelerandos in certain religious hymns, consists chiefly in the indefinite repetition of a number of very limited musical ideas. Dance forms are still more limited and repetitive. In both genres, variation and the development of personal styles are not encouraged. Innovation, particularly in religious forms, is likely to meet strong resistance; witness the vigorous rejection of Alaqā Gabra Hānnā's innovations in dance by the masters at Gondar.

Like music and dance, Amhara design provides little scope for the free play of imagination. In pottery, basketry, and even in such antique ornamentation as appears on the coins and stelae of Aksum and the churches of Lalibela, the recurring style is that of the continuous repetition of simple geometric patterns. Painting provides a richer medium, but here again individuality is carefully constricted. The subject matter of pictures is limited by tradition to scenes concerning the life of Christ and the saints, and to the *res gestae* of emperors. The manner of treatment of these themes is

* A partial exception to this—the teaching of *qenē*—will be discussed below.

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5



further limited by a number of canons. For example, saints must have no shadows on their faces; "good" characters must be portrayed *en face,* "bad" ones in profile; and honored subjects must be portrayed on the right.* Virtually all aspects of the subject matter—dress, features, actions, symbolism—are prescribed by rigid conventions. That this degree of conformity reflects a cultural attitude and not a want of inventiveness on the part of Amhara artists is shown by the discoveries of Marcel Griaule, who collected hundreds of drawings in Gojjam in the form of silhouettes and graffiti, drawings based on direct observation and exhibiting an "astonishing diversity and revealing . . . a very great liberty of expression." Yet, Griaule observed, "these drawings are scorned by the people, who pay scarcely any attention to them; and by the artists themselves, who regard them as a sort of pastime of no importance, or as an activity reserved primarily for apprentices."[29]

In painting, as in the performing arts, individuality was suppressed not only by the pressure to conform to given models but also by the anonymity of the artists involved. This is more striking in the case of painting which, particularly in the form of miniatures, produced some exceptional works. But painting was carried out for the most part as a devotional activity, and its practitioners were apparently content to remain unknown.

### *The Written Word and the Oral Tradition*

The written literature of Ethiopia provides as little scope for individuality as does its painting. Like the painters, the authors of the Ethiopian manuscripts have for the most part remained anonymous. Their subject matter has been narrowly circumscribed by the force of tradition, and their genres have been just as narrowly conventionalized.

Ethiopian literature consists primarily of religious writings, in the first instance of free translations from Greek, Syriac, and Arabic texts. Where the writings are original they tend to be either expositions of traditional beliefs and rituals of the church, eulogies of saints, or expressions of pious fantasy on religious themes. The nature of this literature is to extol sacred objects, not to express individual personality. The *Investigations of Zar'a Yā'qob,* a very personal and imaginative critique of prevailing orthodoxies dated in the seventeenth century and reminiscent of the French *philosophes,* is the exception that proves the rule; for this manuscript has proved to be a forgery, the work of a Franciscan missionary to Ethiopia in the early nineteenth century.[30]

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[175] * The seriousness with which such conventions seem to have been taken is shown by the episode of Brancaleone, a Venetian painter who was in Ethiopia during the reign of Ba'eda Māryām (1468–78), who is said to have provoked an uproar by painting a Madonna with the child on her left arm instead of the conventional right.